

Coping with the Credit Crisis



Coping with the Credit Crisis

Millions of people have suffered economic problems for many years. However, the intensity of such difficulties has grown in recent times when high inflation and unemployment have put many families into untenable situations. As individual resources dwindle, so do the individual psychological difficulties, often resulting in loss of interest or actual problems leading to disease.

In Texas, as elsewhere, social service agencies attempt to maintain services at a time when government funds as well as private gifts and contributions have either declined or at least failed to keep pace with increasing costs. Maintaining previous service levels is difficult, and new programs seem possible only if they are likely to meet a pressing need and only if new monies can be obtained. At the same time, however, many agencies are being faced with a larger number of clients. The new economic conditions cause lower income families to seek services from the program and those whose mental health is threatened by the same economic instability haunting the rest of the community. The agency is thus faced with an inability to keep up.

Terrence R. Tutchings

SOCON MAKES IT EASY TO SAVE!
Most major credit cards
accepted!
Interest-free layaway!
Easy monthly payments
with approved credit!

Hogg Foundation for Mental Health
The University of Texas
Austin, Texas 78712
Second Printing 1981

Coping with the Credit Crisis

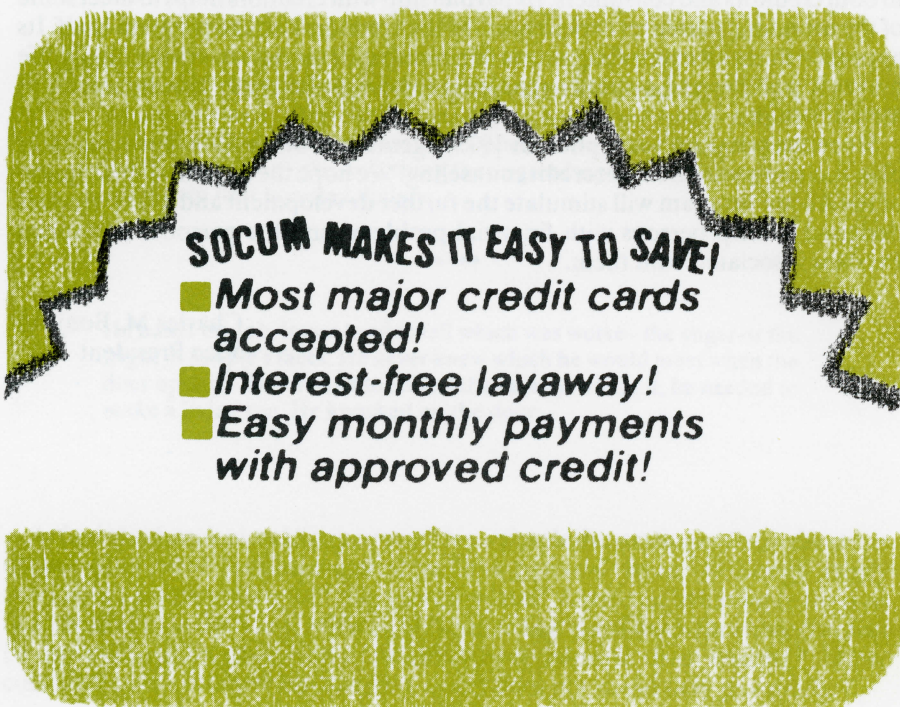
Terrance R. Tutchings

© 1980 Hogg Foundation for Mental Health

Introduction

Multitudes of people have suffered economic problems and pressures for many years. However, the intensity of such difficulties has grown in recent times when high inflation and unemployment have put many families into untenable situations. As economic pressures escalate, so do the attendant psychological difficulties, often surfacing as family violence or marital problems leading to divorce.

In Texas, as elsewhere, social service agencies attempt to maintain services at a time when government funds, as well as private gifts and clients' fees, have either declined or at least failed to keep pace with increasing costs. Maintaining previous service levels is difficult, and new programs seem possible only if they are likely to meet a pressing need and only if new resources can be discovered. At the same time, however, many agencies are being faced with a larger number of clients. The new consumers are those who no longer can afford services from the private sector and those whose mental health is threatened by the same economic malady haunting the service providers—the stress and insecurity stemming from an inability to keep expenses in line with income.



SOCUM MAKES IT EASY TO SAVE!

■ ***Most major credit cards
accepted!***

■ ***Interest-free layaway!***

■ ***Easy monthly payments
with approved credit!***

Both levels of the problem are being addressed creatively by Child and Family Service of Austin, Texas. The agency's new Consumer Credit Counseling Program grew out of recognition of family stress caused by economic pressures. Funds for the program came from foundations and individual donations and primarily from seed money donated by creditors themselves who realized they had as much to gain from the program as the consumers. In its first six months, the program assisted 222 families with financial problems through budget counseling, debt management plans and educational seminars. During that same period, \$32,000 owed on overdue debts were disbursed to creditors.

In the early phases of the program, up to two-thirds of the families and individuals served by Consumer Credit Counseling simultaneously received other types of counseling at Child and Family Service or from other agencies. In many instances, the credit counseling contact was the stimulus enabling referral for other types of services. Without this unique entry point, many in need of mental health assistance would never have received it.

Child and Family Service has designed a program supported by and of benefit to both creditors and consumers. Its partnership with creditors helps to meet some of the economic pressures experienced by the creditors and the program itself. Its approach to credit counseling as one of a number of services to enrich family life moves it well beyond a strictly economic service and directly into the realm of mental health.

Since the program's inception in 1979, agencies in other cities have begun to plan their own variations on credit counseling. We hope the following description of the Austin program will stimulate the further development and use of services designed to help persons with financial problems and the personal and social troubles associated with them.

Charles M. Bonjean
Vice President

Prologue

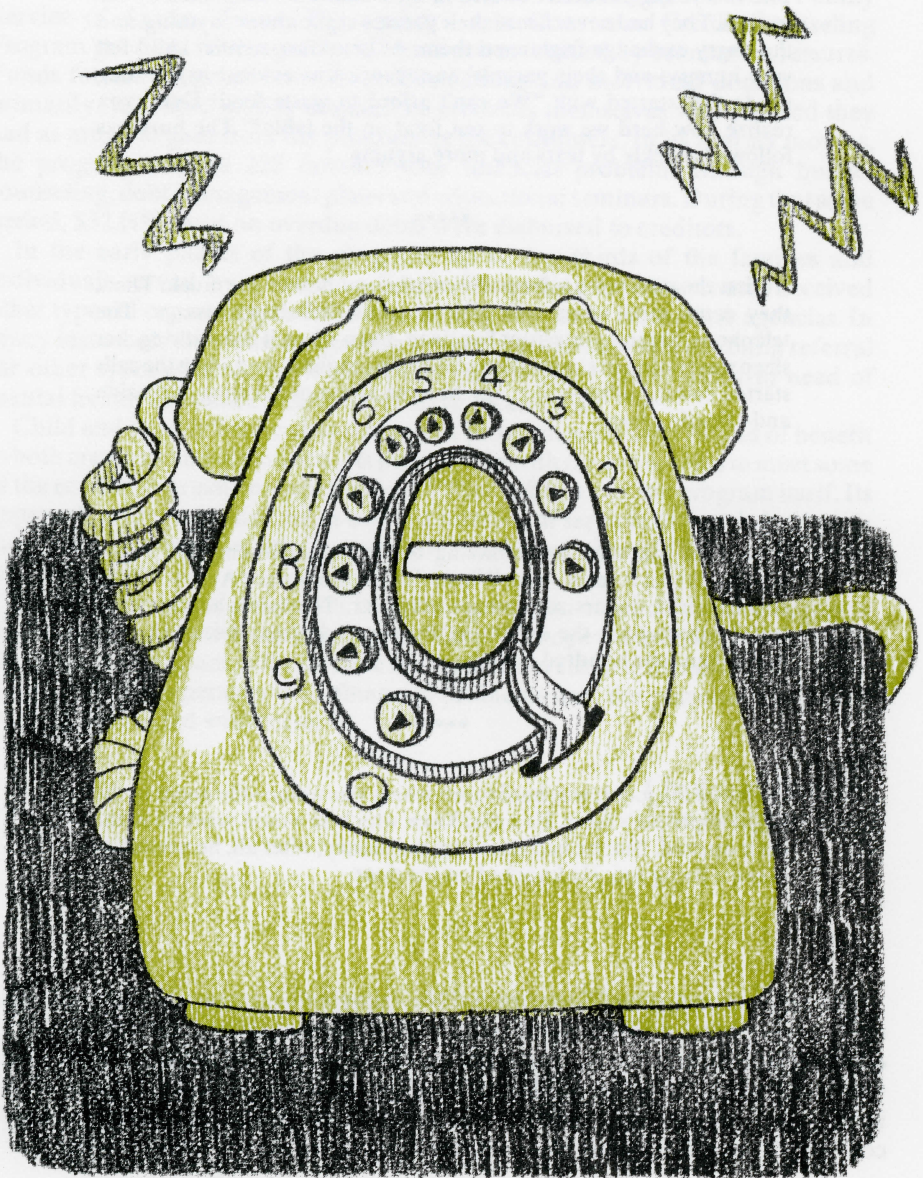
The two young children huddled in their bedroom, awakened by the sounds. They had never heard their parents argue about anything, and the angry exchange frightened them. At breakfast, neither child felt very hungry, and their parents' annoyance was evident in the long tirade that started with "We can't afford to waste food! Don't you realize how hard we work to put food on the table?" The hurt was followed quickly by tears and more arguing.

At first the calls were infrequent and did not bother her much. Then, they came more often and with a more persistent message. The telephone began to interrupt her sleep. Even when it did not ring, her sleep was restless in expectation of the next jangling. And when the calls started coming to her office, she became aware of a feeling of tension and—finally—fear.

It seemed that they were having the same argument that began weeks—or was it years—ago. Where did the money go? At first fifty or one hundred dollars seemed to disappear. The latest amount they could agree upon—the *only* thing they agreed upon, it seemed—was more than four hundred dollars.

He hated the job. It was hard to tell which was worse—the anger or the fright in people's faces. He never knew which he would meet when the door opened. But, he had to collect the money; after all, he needed to make a living too. He knocked on the door.

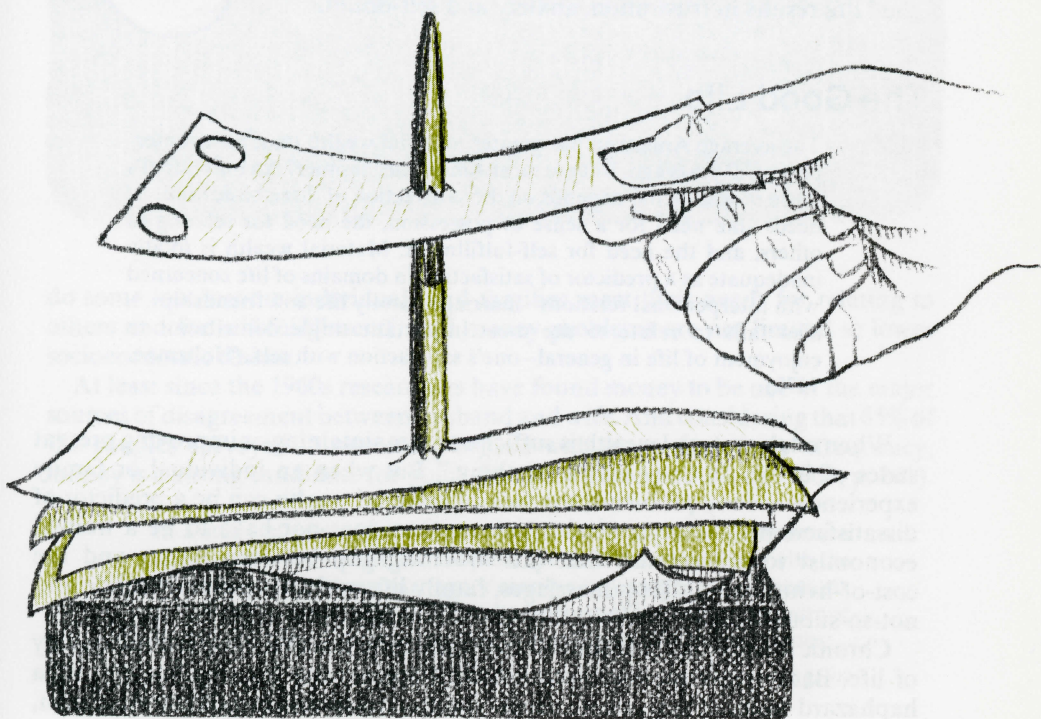
Alfred Hitchcock plots? Soap operas? No—simple illustrations of how the stress of out-of-control indebtedness slips into persons' lives. Although many economists assure us that the "buy now, pay later" consumer behavior of the past two decades is on the wane, millions of families and individuals find little comfort in the declaration that "the consumers have learned their lessons." Many consumers are still learning that easy credit does not mean easy payments.



Money and Mental Health

Multitudes of Americans are so far in debt that they cannot keep up with the monthly installments. Others barely get by. In many instances, of course, "it's their own fault," for they were convinced by arguments based upon the subtle use of sales psychology and the constant barrage of media images of the "good life." Other debtors got into their predicament unconsciously by failing to have any idea of how much money they had available to meet their obligations—a simple lack of any budget plan. Illness, unemployment and inflation can upset the plans of even the most careful budgeters, who are forced to borrow after savings have been used.

Personal loans, credit card charges, revolving-charge agreements and medical debts make up the majority of unsecured debts—debts with no collateral property as security. A creditor faced with a debtor who is not keeping up with payments has little choice but to try to collect what is owed. And, although the practice has been curtailed by recent changes in laws, still many debtors are hounded by collection agencies whose methods range from persistent reminders to actual intimidation and threats.



Among the pressures and uncertainties of modern life, problems with money seem to be among the chief causes of stress. The ties between stress and mental health have been studied in great detail, and the problems associated with lack of money and the ways in which it affects the mental health of adults and children are many. There are the direct effects of not being able to meet basic needs for food, shelter and clothing. Less direct effects of unmet needs may focus on self-concept and interpersonal relationships. Tension between parents—many times brought about by financial pressures—appears to be a cause of problems years later for the grown children. Bad lessons in financial responsibility as well as good lessons can show up long after children have left home. Yet, the effects are rarely clear-cut. Many children who grow up in financially troubled homes turn out to be well-adjusted adults; conversely, even the most affluent are not without mental health problems in some cases. (Langner and Michael, 1963, pp. 100–111).

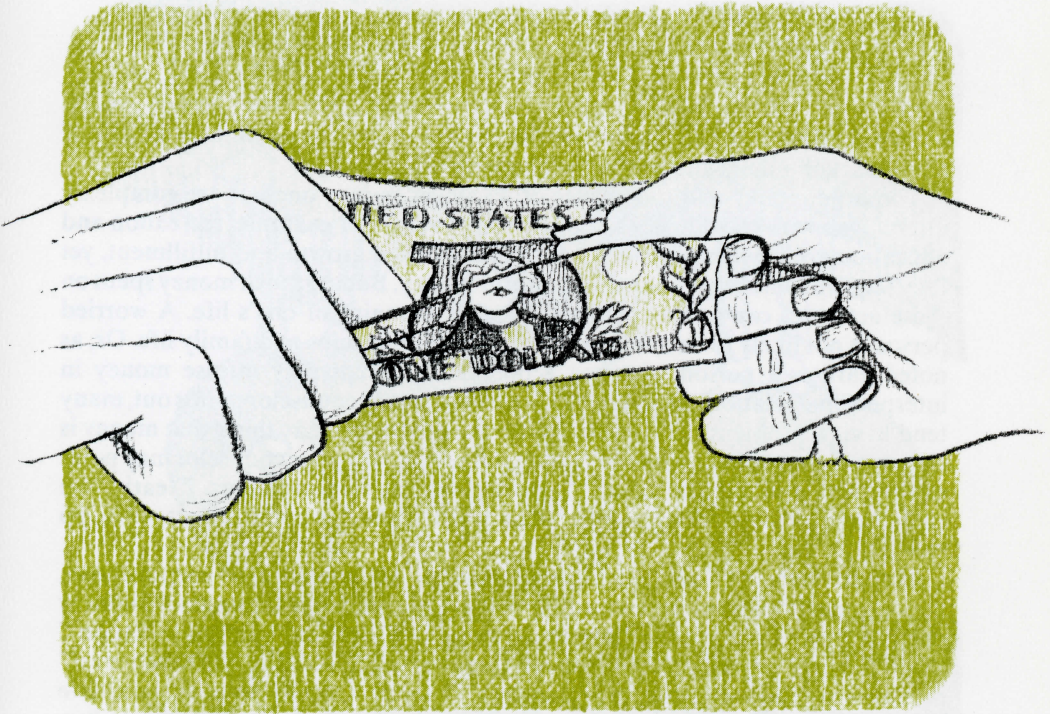
To be sure, much of what Americans call the “good life” appears to depend upon money and the things that money can buy. But, for many, the search for the good life results in frustration, anxiety and self-doubt.

The Good Life

The average American has greater material wealth than his counterpart of 20 years ago. But are most Americans happier? An individual's sense of well-being depends on the satisfaction of three basic kinds of needs—the need for a sense of possession, the need for relating to others, and the need for self-fulfillment. Material wealth is totally inadequate as a predictor of satisfaction in domains of life concerned with interpersonal relations—marriage, family life and friendships. It also fails to relate to the most important single contributor to enjoyment of life in general—one's satisfaction with self. (Holtzman, 1979)

When one's material wealth is sufficient for maintaining or improving present states of being, “money isn't everything.” But when an individual or family experiences money problems, the *lack* of material wealth can be a predictor of dissatisfaction in interpersonal relations. One does not have to be a trained economist to understand that the widening gap between wages and the cost-of-living index affects marriages, family life and friendships in subtle and not-so-subtle ways.

Chronic low income means to the individual and family a lower overall quality of life. Basic needs such as nutrition, health care, and housing are met on a haphazard basis, at best, when income is limited and undependable. How then,



do some low-income individuals and families meet their needs for relating to others and for self-fulfillment? And money problems are not limited to lower socioeconomic classes.

At least since the 1960s researchers have found money to be one of the major sources of disagreement between husband and wife. And considering that 65% of the couples surveyed in one study *argued* with more than “rare” frequency, money is a strong candidate for much discord. (Blood and Wolfe, 1960, p. 241).

In a study of requests for counseling made to various family service agencies, more than half the couples reported severe problems with the money aspects of their marriage. Yet only a tiny proportion of them, six percent to be exact, were in difficulty because of inadequate income or financial need. Most couples were in trouble for two other reasons:

1. Immature or unrealistic attitudes toward the earning, saving, or spending of money;

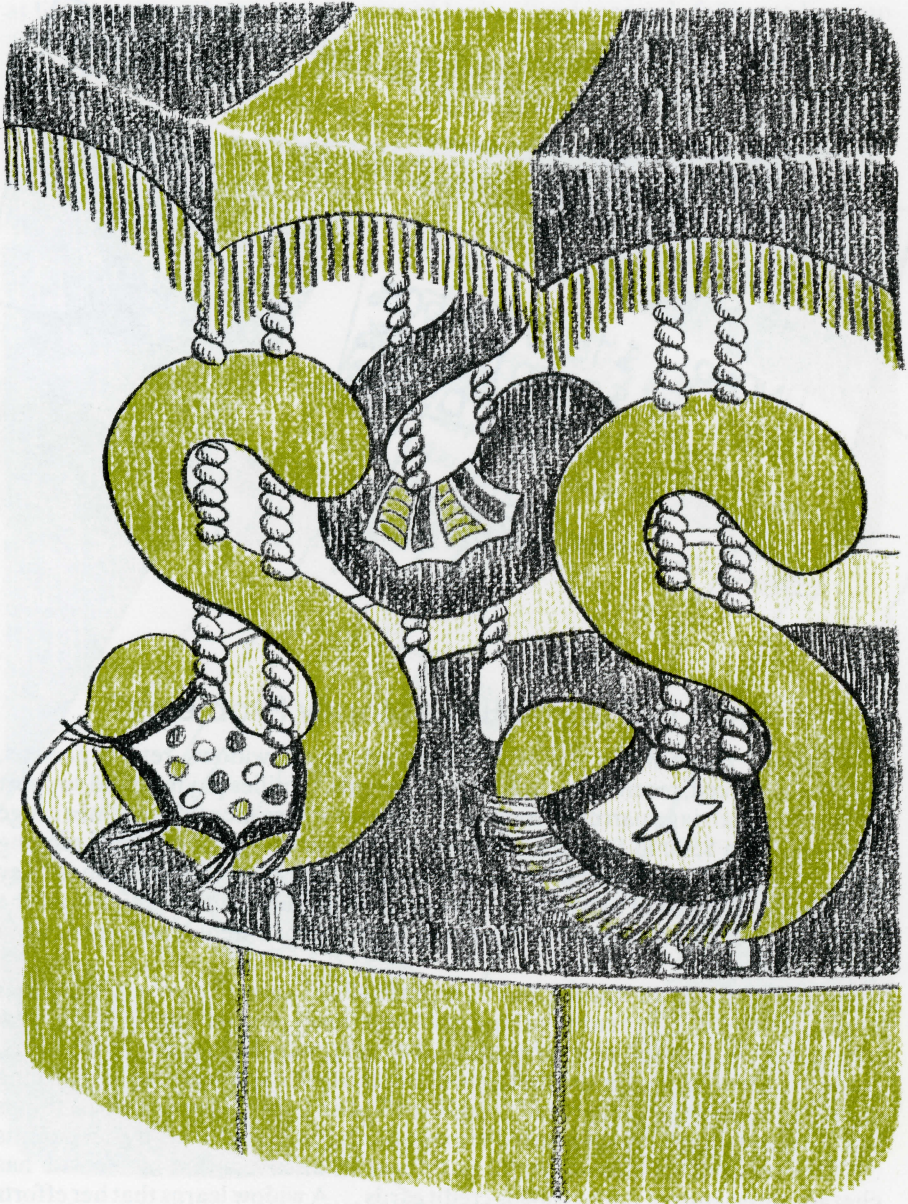
2. The emotional use of money either as a weapon with which to control or punish a spouse or as a way of compensating for inadequacies, guilt or the inability to give love. (Lobsenz and Blackburn, 1969, p 89.)

So, we must add to lack of money, the misuse of money as another spoiler of relations with others and of satisfaction with self.

Too little money and the misuse of whatever money one has are complexly interwoven with relationships and self-fulfillment. For example, recreation and education are key elements in a person's continued growth and fulfillment, yet they require some expenditure of time and money. But too much money spent on these activities can cause problems in other domains of one's life. A worried person is not likely to be a full participant in relationships and family life. Or, as noted earlier, a person who has a poor self-concept may misuse money in interpersonal relationships. As an experienced family counselor points out, many tend to view problems too simplistically: the economist may think that money is the answer to problems with self and relationships, while the counselor may point at the person as the source of his or her own money problems. Clearly, the elements interact with one another (Campbell, Converse and Rodgers, 1976, pp 368-387).

Modern societies are consumer societies. All consumers—corporations, couples, even children—receive a daily barrage of conflicting messages. "Buy now and pay later—inflation will continue to go up." "Save money to fight inflation." "Don't charge anything." "Charge anything you need—it's the American way." Some corporations report profits that seem to set new records in each successive quarter, while others are near bankruptcy. Indeed, some corporations are "on welfare." But, at the level of the community, and for the individual or family, economic uncertainty is a daily reality for many. And the uncertainty is not shown by some abstract index. It is *felt* as stress, anxiety and worry. Most people know full well what "the age of declining expectations" feels like—it feels like going without. Many people react negatively to the notion of waiting for what they have been told is the good life.

For the most part, policy makers and decision makers in government and in corporate positions have learned their trade at universities or at summer management institutes. However, for the individual or for the family, there is practically no education available for managing money—for being smart consumers. How many civics classes or social studies courses address the responsible use of money? For that matter, with the possible exception of home economics or business majors, how many college graduates have received any real education in personal finance? It is no wonder that responsible people get caught up in easy credit and poor money management. The only consistent message that many have received is that material possessions mean success and happiness.



RANGE OF BALANCES	PERIODIC RATE	ANNUAL PERCENTAGE RATE
UNDER \$1500	1.50%	18.00%
1500 TO \$2500	1.00%	12.00%
OVER \$2500	0.83%	9.96%

What Kinds of People Have Money Problems?

All kinds. Those still in their teens, married, single, widows, retired persons, recently divorced, recently married, single parents, families paying child support to previous marriage partners, couples . . . persons whose monthly incomes range from less than \$500 to families with over \$3,000 per month, with debts ranging from a few hundred dollars to three or four times their total yearly income! They come from all kinds of neighborhoods—from the affluent suburbs and from the inner-city areas. Virtually anyone can face problems of indebtedness at one time or another.

A college graduate starting out in a professional career discovers that what appeared to be a generous salary does not meet the payments on a new condominium, new car, new furniture . . . A couple, married for over twenty years, begin to talk seriously for the first time about the lack of any savings . . . A young couple contemplates the birth of their first child and realizes that the best things in life are *not* free . . . An unmarried teenage mother is turned away by her parents . . . A recently-divorced, successful businessman discovers that his ex-wife has charged thousands of dollars on his credit cards . . . A widow learns that her efforts

at living independently are threatened by her fixed income's failing to keep up with living expenses. Many are the ways in which people find themselves running out of money before they run out of bills to pay.

PROUDS OF TEXAS
DEPARTMENT STORE / CUSTOMER'S COPY

DATE	QUANTITY	UNIT PRICE	TOTAL PRICE	DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT PAID	BALANCE
8/24	1	2234	2234	PAYMENT	46.00	11.55
8/10	5	COI	50.00	SHIRTS	8.75	
8/07	1	2534	2534	STATIONERY		

PAST DUE

DATE	QUANTITY	UNIT PRICE	TOTAL PRICE	DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT PAID	BALANCE
11-55	1	59.00	59.00			
11-55	1	11.55	11.55			
11-55	1	NONE	NONE			
11-55	1	59.11	59.11			
11-55	1	25.66	25.66			

11-55 59.00 11-55 11.55 11-55 NONE 11-55 59.11 11-55 25.66

The Consumer Credit Counseling Program of Child and Family Service

Money problems do not necessarily cause personal problems, and personal problems do not always show up as overextended credit. But the two fit together frequently enough for one community agency to decide that it should provide a specific service to head off the anxiety and stress suffered by persons having difficulty with financial obligations.

Child and Family Service of Austin has administered many programs since it was begun in 1910. As early as 1940, the agency assisted families experiencing financial difficulties. In 1945, professional counseling was added to help meet the needs of families and individuals. Today, the services include family life enrichment programs, individual, marriage and family therapy, and assistance for school age parents.

Services of this family agency have come and gone as funds were available, or as funds were redirected to other caregivers. The initial financial assistance of the early 1940s for example, was later carried out by the State public welfare department and has continued there for low-income persons. However, the late 1970s gave evidence of an increasing need for financial assistance of a different kind. The staff noticed more and more that persons in the family life education classes and in therapy were having great difficulties with personal finances. Sometimes, the complaints were made in a joking way—but persistently. Then, there were the families near the breaking point of divorce or separation because of recurring arguments about money. Even though most of the families and individuals were not what would be considered poverty-level clients, they were nonetheless experiencing grave difficulties in meeting financial obligations in an inflationary economy.

For years there have existed several consumer credit programs in other Texas cities, but none was part of a family service agency. Staff and board members planned at great length, concerned with the combining of what many clients might see initially as a "collection agency" within the humane organization they knew Child and Family Service to be. But the board and staff recognized as well the value of combining consumer credit counseling with other mental health services to be the additional help that many families needed to resolve immediate stresses while receiving other services. After meeting with major creditors in Austin, Child and Family Service enlisted the assistance of leading businesses which became real partners in the effort. Even though the creditors realized that they would have to wait a considerably longer time for debts to be paid off, they nonetheless contributed \$25,000 for the initial year of the program. Several agreed to contribute back to the program fifteen percent of what they received from debtors! Additional funds were received from the J. W. and Cornelia R. Scarbrough Foundation, the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, and individual contributors; and a professional debt counseling staff was added to the mental health and family life education personnel.

Outreach efforts, in the forms of personal contacts and educational presentations, were begun all over town. Clients already using other Child and Family Service programs learned of the new effort. And people started coming in.

New clients at Child and Family Service's Consumer Credit Counseling office may never become aware of the other types of counseling offered, unless they need to do so. The entrance to the consumer counseling office is around the corner from the main entrance, on a quiet side street. The obvious advantage to this physical arrangement is that many people would turn down any service that suggested association with mental health or mental illness, failing to realize that debt-related stress can affect mental health. Staff members are always alert for other problems that may require referral to appropriate services elsewhere in the agency or in the community.



How Does the Program Operate?

A number of the credit counseling clients are people who recognize early symptoms of budget problems. A certain realization that there must be a better way of handling money—better than waiting until payday to buy necessities such as food and clothing—causes them to seek help. These persons are fortunate, and for some of them, the counseling program's Educational Services are the only assistance they need. This service combines consumer education, smart buying practices, and information about the use of credit in eight-hour courses for small groups meeting as clubs, in community agencies, or in homes—wherever a group of individuals wants such a course.

For persons already experiencing some difficulties in meeting obligations, Consumer Credit Counseling offers Budget Counseling. This service helps individuals and families in developing workable budgets before their obligations outpace their ability to pay.

When an individual who is already behind in fulfilling financial obligations comes to Consumer Credit Counseling, the process is more involved and may require a Debt Management Plan. First, an appointment with a Consumer Credit counselor is arranged. During this initial conference, the counselor and the clients work together to develop such a plan. They start with the basics—how much money does the client have, and what are the demands upon the client for payment of bills. Monthly expenses are divided into two categories: living expenses and other debts. Living expenses include food, housing, transportation, health care, child care, utilities and insurance—more or less the essentials. After subtracting living expenses from total monthly income, the remaining amount is apportioned among the numerous creditors on the basis of how much is owed to each.

Many of the clients express great surprise when they first see their Debt Management Plan. The following are some typical case examples, derived from a credit counselor's notebook:

Case 1: Mr. and Mrs. -----; mid-30s, two children in school,
two jobs, two cars; nice, brick home with two-car
garage . . .

Living expenses	
Mortgage payment	\$371
Electricity	75
Phone	30
Gas	35
Food	300

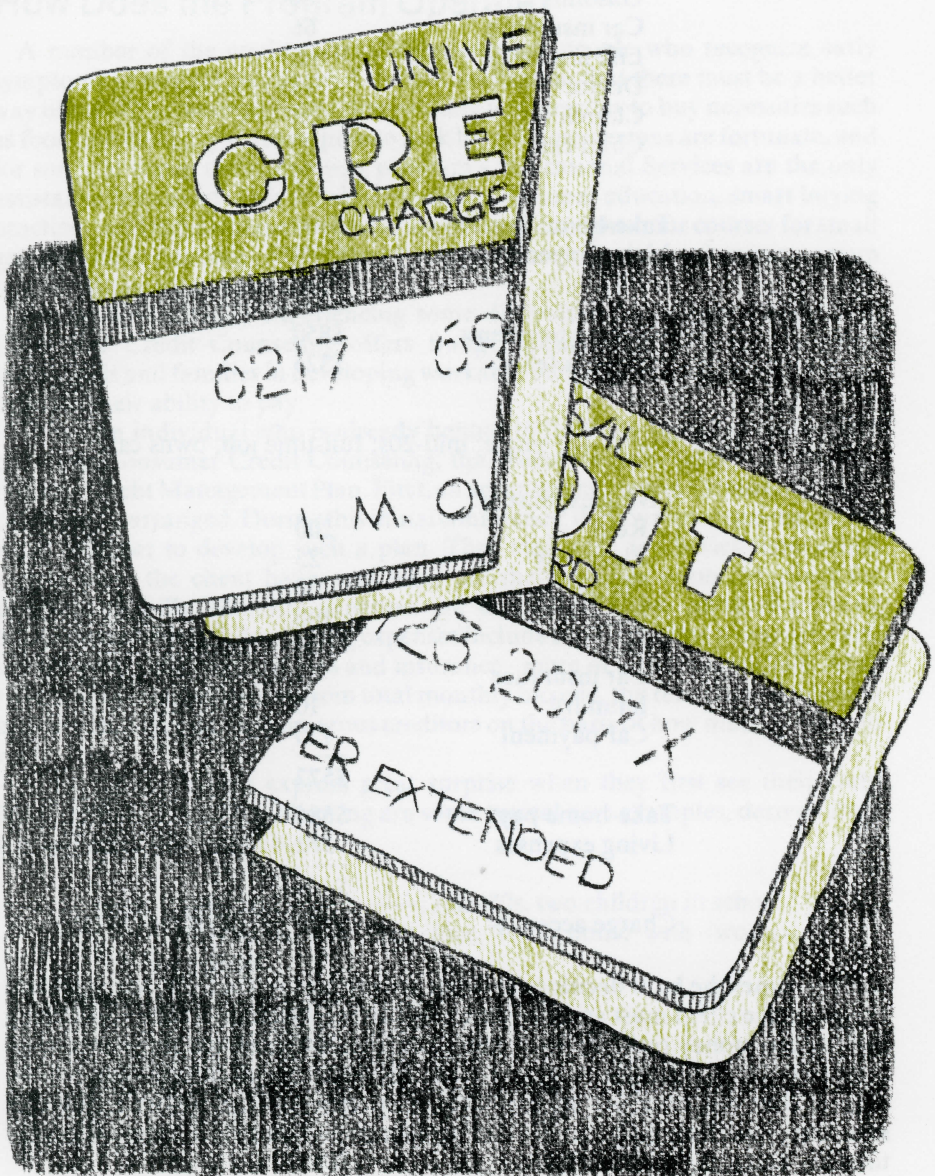
15

Gasoline	80
Car insurance	66
Life insurance	86
Doctor	15
Church	20
Child care	100
	<hr/>
	\$1,178
Take-home pay	\$1,700
Living expenses	1,178
	<hr/>
	522
Monthly payments	\$850
"In the hole"	\$325

Case 2: Ms. -----; single; mid-20s; full-time job; owns car

Living expenses	
Rent	200
Electricity	25
Phone	50
Food	100
Gas	40
Car insurance	27
Laundry	10
Car payment	120
	<hr/>
	\$572
Take-home pay	\$586
Living expenses	572
	<hr/>
	\$ 14
Charge accounts	\$120 (TOO MUCH!!)

Now comes the hard decision. In order to take part in the Debt Management Program, the client must agree to turn over to the Consumer Credit Counseling Service the money required each month to meet the prorated payments to all creditors. The agreement means as well that all financial information will be shared with the creditors so that they may appraise the debtor's financial situation—and, hopefully, realize that smaller payments over a longer period of time are better than no payments at all.



At this point, the Consumer Credit Counseling Program makes the creditor a partner in the Debt Management Plan. Each creditor is sent a letter explaining the service provided to the client and how that service will assist the creditor in receiving what is owed. The client's total indebtedness, monthly living expenses and the amount of money available to pay all creditors are explained in clear fashion. If the creditor accepts the plan, he agrees to refrain from any direct collection activities and allows the Counseling Program to act as trustee in disbursing the agreed-upon amount each month. Creditors are permitted the opportunity to support the services by making a tax-deductible contribution to the program, based upon a percentage of what is distributed to the creditor each month.

It all sounds simple, but the first difficulty to be overcome is that of seeking help on the part of the debtor. Whether from stubborn independence or from distrust of others in handling one's problems, many of the debtors will not ask for aid until their financial condition is really dire.

How do people get themselves into such a fix? Some of the more frequent ways are outlined in an educational program offered by the Consumer Credit Counseling Service:

- 1) underestimating living costs because no records are kept;
- 2) being unprepared for unexpected expenses and emergencies;
- 3) spending on a "buy now—think later" basis;
- 4) loss of overtime pay or part-time job;
- 5) unplanned pregnancy;
- 6) divorce;
- 7) problems in balancing the checkbook.

On the face of it, many of these difficulties appear to be avoidable. However, when two or more of them happen, things start to snowball. And, the worse things become, the more the problems seem to build. People find it difficult to admit to themselves that they might need advice in financial matters. Whether from embarrassment or from a sense of helplessness, many clients struggle along in a losing battle with bills. How bad do things have to be before help is sought? Some families take out new loans to meet current obligations, only to find themselves with a larger amount owed the next month. They float checks in the mail, hoping that they will find money somewhere before the checks meet with an insufficient funds stamp at their bank. Some will actually go without food and clothing in an effort to have enough money to pay some pressing obligation—and then they will become desperate to the point of charging food at a convenience store. It is when all these temporary remedies finally collapse in a flurry of bills that many turn to the professional help offered by Consumer Credit Counseling.

The next step in the Debt Management Plan is to have the plan accepted by the creditors. Upon learning of the financial condition of a client, one credit manager

wrote off a small debt he had been eager to collect. Another—this one with an out-of-state credit card company—called the office, completely unwilling to cooperate. The first threat made to the consumer credit counselor was to put a second mortgage on the couple's house. When the counselor explained that this could not be done in Texas, the creditor then said, "Well, we will slap a second note on their car." A short silence followed the counselor's explanation that Texas law would not allow this. "We will garnishee his wages, then." Once again, the patient response of the counselor told the fuming caller that this would not be possible. A very long silence was followed by a begrudging agreement to sign the participation plan—and a passing exclamation of, "Think I'll move to Texas!"

Does It Really Work?

During the first year of operation, the Consumer Credit Counseling program served nearly 650 clients. Of this number, 87 families entered Debt Management Plans to help them satisfy debts that totaled over three-quarters of a million dollars. For 400 clients, Budget Counseling was sufficient to help them avoid any credit crisis.

Since it takes from twenty-four to thirty-six months for Debt Management Plans to clear all debts, only a few families have paid off all of their obligations. However, hundreds of Austin families are seeing their debt-related problems become more manageable, and hundreds of creditors are finding benefits in the form of regular repayment of outstanding accounts. Several creditors voluntarily took lower priorities in receiving payments, set lower payments, or suspended finance charges on the balance remaining. Business people who are members of the advisory board point with deserved pride to the civic-minded participation of such creditors. Although total payment of indebtedness is the long-range goal of the services, more immediate gains are shown by program participants. The first improvement is noted by staff a short time after clients sit down with a debt counselor to discuss their problems. Almost immediately, most clients are relieved to find out that they are not criminals. Much self-blame and anxiety are dispelled by the initial assurances that there is a way to work out this common problem. Families learn that there are alternatives to bankruptcy, an option that virtually all clients fear and avoid.

As might be expected, a number of the Consumer Credit Counseling clients find that help with their money problems is not enough. Voluntarily, they enter other programs of Child and Family Service to meet needs for making relationships better among family members. It is this function of debt counseling as an entry point for other counseling services that doubles its effectiveness in making stronger the families that seek its benefits.

Optimistic Prospects for the Future?

Surprisingly, the staff members of the Consumer Credit Counseling Service are not discouraged by the daily news of worse times ahead. First, they have learned in the initial months of the program that many problems can be avoided by applying sound money management principles that are easy to learn. These principles are imparted effectively in Budget Counseling sessions and in the educational courses offered. When national economic changes are forecast, the news actually seems to increase awareness on the part of the consumers. As more and more people become aware of the need for such services, the staff see prevention of financial problems as the logical way of dealing with hard times.

A second encouraging trend is for businesses to become involved more actively in helping their customers remain responsible consumers. National efforts by major creditors to reeducate the public are matched on the local level by careful efforts to help people spend more wisely. One local credit manager, who initially reacted with "they should have known better" when asked to participate, now recognizes that he approved the credit application in the first place, and he has become an active partner in the Debt Management Plan. More optimism is encouraged by a recent referral from a commercial debt collection agency. The debt collector recognized that the problems of one family were too great for him to continue to pressure them, and he sent them to Consumer Credit Counseling.

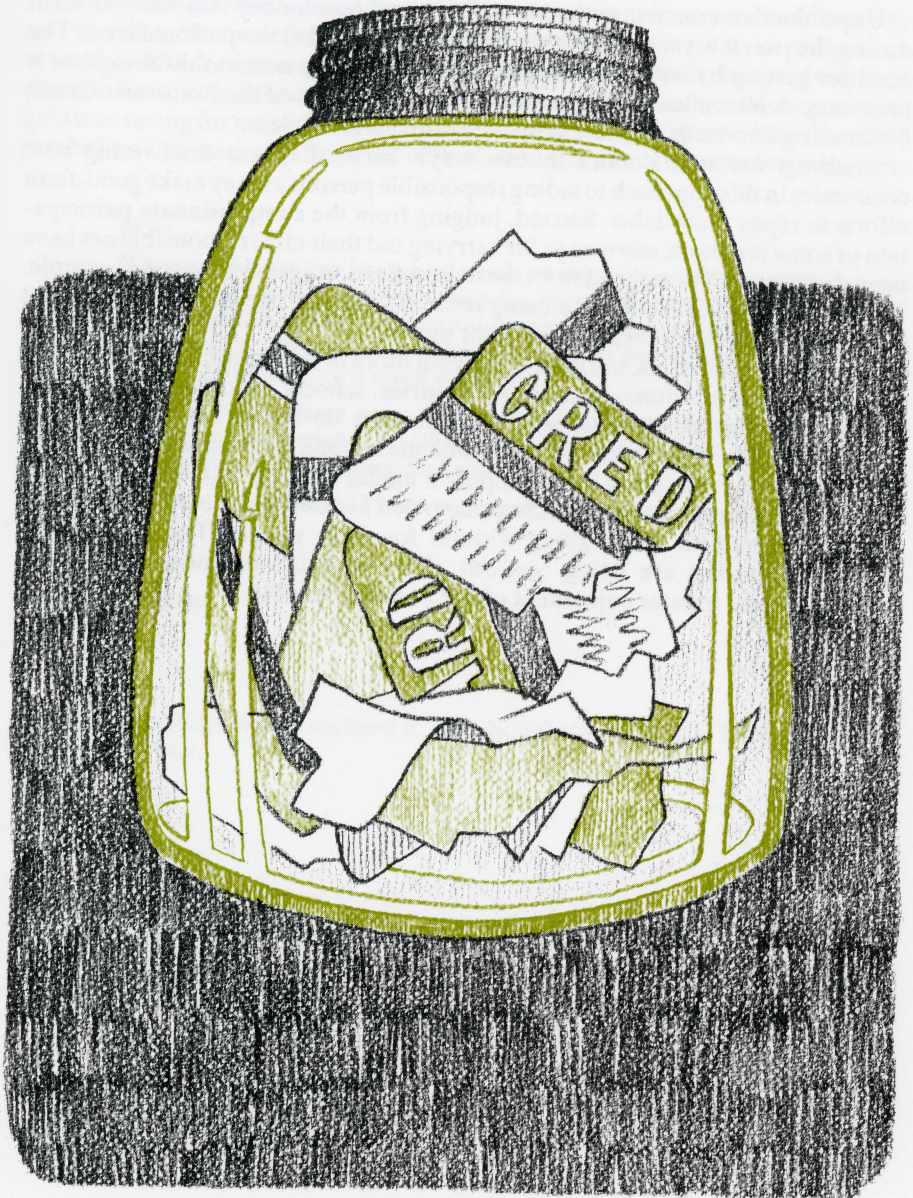
New Car Buying Problems

1. Special member prices —
 2. Low interest rate financing —
 3. International car purchase program —
- saves you
Time and
Money

20

The creditors and foundations who helped start the program are continuing support in the second year of operation. Additional funds are coming from the Junior League of Austin along with four volunteers to aid in followup of clients and in the educational program to be presented in city schools.

Finally, many of the families who participate find that their first contact with a helping agency is not a demeaning experience. This news spreads by word-of-mouth to other families in precarious situations—financially and psychologically—and may help those families avoid greater problems in the future. The first step in helping oneself is to seek aid from someone else. A cooperative program of creditors, debtors and a counseling agency in the community can help people take that first step.



Doing More With Less

Unproductive concern with the problems of less money has been evident during the past few years at both the national level and at the personal level. The need for getting by with less seems to carry with it the notion that *doing* less is necessary. A lesson learned from the initial experiences of the Consumer Credit Counseling Service is that it is possible to do *more* with less.

Creditors are doing more in two ways. First, they are discovering new economies in this approach to aiding responsible persons as they make good-faith efforts to repay their debts. Second, judging from the compassionate participation of some creditors, *more* ways for carrying out their civic responsibilities have been discovered. The referral from the debt collection agency is but one example. The costs of debt collection are being reduced—not just the monetary costs, but the psychic costs to collector and debtor as well.

The community gains, too, and it will gain more in the future. The partnership among debtors, creditors, community agencies, schools, voluntary associations and foundations shows what a community can do for its residents. Similar approaches may help to solve other problems in spite of diminished resources, and citizens can take pride in developing a model to share with others.

Surely, the families and individuals involved are doing more. No longer does meeting obligations mean going without for these people. The pressures of meeting payments are being reduced along with the payments, and more self-respect and greater enjoyment of life become possible.

Epilogue

Getting one's debts under control requires a long-term investment of discipline and sacrifice. The benefits of less worry and the ability to meet more obligations reward careful budgeters, but the temptations to spend or to charge always are present. This is the case especially during holiday seasons, when the urge to give gifts is so strong for many people. The following is excerpted from a letter received just before Christmas the first year of the Consumer Credit Counseling program:

Dear _____,

We wanted to let you know how much we sincerely appreciate your help. Thanks to you, a great burden has been lifted from us. I don't think I could have kept my sanity at the rate we were going. It is very disturbing, having creditors calling on your job and at home at all hours. The paperwork is much easier also.

With the Xmas season being here, it would have been hard to resist charging on the accounts and taking out more loans. But I can honestly say we can resist that temptation now.

Keep up the good work! I know many people appreciate you and your time.

Season's Greetings!

Sincerely,

.....

Whether or not the writer realized it, this thoughtfulness is the kind of gift that money can't buy.

References

- Blood, Robert O. and Donald M. Wolfe, *Husbands and Wives—The Dynamics of Married Living*. Glencoe, Ill: The Free Press, 1960.
- Campbell, Angus; Philip E. Converse; and Willard L. Rodgers, *The Quality of American Life: Perceptions, Evaluations, and Satisfaction*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1976.
- Holtzman, Wayne H., "America's Future: Dream or Nightmare?" Speech given at annual meeting of Philosophical Society of Texas, Austin, December 8, 1979.
- Langner, Thomas S. and Stanley T. Michael, *Life Stress and Mental Health*. Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1963.
- Lobsenz, Norman M. and Clark W. Blackburn, *How to Stay Married—A Modern Approach to Sex, Money and Emotions*. New York: Cowles Book Co., Inc., 1969.

